



THE WAYFARER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON COMMEMORATIVE COMMITTEE INC.



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MANY VOICES, ONE GOAL: IMMORTALISING A POET

The movement that led to the Paul Montford-designed statue of Australia's National Poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon in Spring Street, Melbourne has its origins in a gathering of prominent men on 18 December 1911. It would be another two decades before the dream was realised, thanks to a World War and a Great Depression. Here is *The Argus* report of the meeting;

"A public meeting convened by the provisional committee of the Gordon memorial fund was held in the King's Theatre yesterday. In the absence of Sir John Madden the chair was taken by Mr. Edmund Duggan.

The Chairman announced that the provisional committee had received about £60 from private admirers of the poet, and influential bodies such as the A.N.A. had promised to further the movement. The outlook, therefore, was most promising. (Applause.)

In answer to an inquiry, Mr. Knight said that to erect a statue worthy of the poet would probably entail a cost of £2,000.

Mr. Julius Grant then read letters from His Excellency the Governor-General (Lord Denman), the Prime Minister

(Mr. Fisher), Mr. Deakin, the Lord Mayor (Councillor Davey), Senators Russell and Blakey, who all expressed regret that they were unable to be present at a meeting whose object they were thoroughly in sympathy with. The Governor-General enclosed a cheque for £5; five guineas were forwarded by Mr. Norman Menzies and by Mr. A. H. Massina, and one guinea each by Senators Blakey and Russell and Mr. Farthing, M.L.A.

Writing from Gowangardie station, near Dockie, Mr. W. Grattan requested that his name might be put down for a subscription of 20 guineas. He added that some time ago he had commissioned Mr. John Longstaff to paint a picture on the lines-

*"Between sky and water,
The blow [sic-Crown] came and caught her,"*

taken from "How We Beat the Favourite". The commission for this picture was £300. Mr. Grattan stated that the picture should arrive in about three weeks, and that he proposed to exhibit it for some time in the National Gallery.

This letter was received with loud applause. And so was another from an old lady

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(above) Edmund Duggan, first Chairman of the Gordon Memorial Committee

(La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, H10258/a15405)



(above) Senator Albert Blakey (1880-1935), one of the many admirers of Gordon buried at the Brighton General Cemetery (Vic) (By permission of the National Library of Australia, nla.pic-an23236633)

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BUCKING PUBLIC OPINION: THE ARGUS

Not everyone supported the notion of immortalising Gordon in stone. *The Argus* editorial of 27 February 1912 was critical of the idea but supported a bust in the State Library:

“We must all sympathise with those admirers of Adam Lindsay Gordon who are seeking the memory of a poet whom they feel to be slipping into unmerited neglect. Perhaps, however, their efforts would evoke a more enthusiastic response if they told us definitely what form of memorial they have in mind. For a poet, it may be pointed out, is not in the same position, so far as posterity is concerned, as a statesman, or a general, for these, however great their achievements, may have left nothing definite or tangible behind them to remind us of their services to their country—and that is why their grateful country commemorates their deeds in marble or in bronze. But a poet, in a sense, built a definite monument to

himself during his lifetime, in the book which contains his verse; and this monument may be, according to the measure of his genius, more enduring than brass, or more transitory than the flower of the field. In either case, it is his only real monument. If his verses continue to be read and loved, he needs no statue;

‘What needs my Shakespeare, for his honour’d bones, The labour of an age in piled stones?’

If his verses, on the other hand, are forgotten, no statue will avail to preserve his memory. What will be the fate of Gordon’s poems? Certainly the time has long since gone by for adopting towards them the tone adopted by Mr. Murray at the meeting on Sunday afternoon. Those who talk nonsense about Gordon are really doing the gravest possible disservice to his memory: and nonsense it assuredly is to say, as one speaker at the same meeting said, that “every line he wrote finds ‘an echo in the

heart of every man whose blood runs red and strong”. It would be fatally easy to quote lines from almost every page in his book which would make this statement seem grotesque. Yet he was undoubtedly a poet, though not often a completely articulate poet; some, at any rate, of his verses will probably live, because they transmute into the real gold of poetry the raw stuff of early Australian life; and some will live because of the genuine manhood which in them painfully struggles to express itself. Apart from some half-dozen of his poems, the interest in Gordon’s work will be, more and more, a purely historic interest; his name will be remembered as that of the earliest Australian poet. A statue in our streets would be somewhat absurd: but a bust of Gordon, to be placed in the Public Library, would be a welcome and appropriate addition to our national collection”.

(Source: *The Argus* 27 Feb 1912 p6)

“Those who talk nonsense about Gordon are really doing the gravest possible disservice to his memory...”

MEMBERS

Members can read the full newspaper article on the Members’ Area on our website

www.adamlindsaygordon.org

MANY VOICES, ONE GOAL: IMMORTALISING A POET...CONTINUED

(Continued from page 1)

[Elizabeth Lauder] whose only income now is her old age pension. She knew the poet well, and she enclosed 2/ as the widow’s mite. She also offered to place at the disposal of the committee a

life-size photo of the poet which she had kept as a memento of happier days. It was stated by a gentleman present that for years this faithful admirer of the poet had kept his grave in order at her own expense.

A resolution was passed

requesting this press to receive subscriptions.

Before the meeting closed those present formed themselves into a committee with the object of electing a strong executive”.

(Source: *The Argus* 19 Dec 1911 p7)

PAUL RAPHAEL MONTFORD: A SKILFUL SCULPTOR



(above) Paul R. Montford working on a small cast figure of George Higinbotham
(La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria, H38849/1926, hp001389)

“His seated statue of Adam Lindsay Gordon in Spring Street Gardens, Melbourne, condemned in the Australian press, won the gold medal of the Royal Society of British Sculptors....”



(above) Gordon statue in Spring Street, Melbourne designed by Paul R. Montford. George Higinbotham's statue can be seen in the background to the left

So who exactly is Paul R. Montford, the sculptor who designed Gordon's statue? Here is an extract from the renowned *Australian Dictionary of Biography*:

“MONTFORD, PAUL RAPHAEL (1868-1938), sculptor, was born on 1 November 1868 at Kentish Town, London, son of Horace Montford, sculptor, and his wife Sarah Elizabeth, née Lewis. Horace Montford was curator of schools at the Royal Academy of Arts; Paul learned modelling in his father's studio and drawing at the Lambeth School of Art. He entered the Royal Academy of Arts' schools in 1887 on scholarships and after an outstanding studentship travelled to Italy, Spain and France on another scholarship won in 1891, along with the academy's gold medal.

Montford regularly exhibited portrait-busts at the Royal Academy but specialised in the sculpture of architectural decoration. He completed the façades of Battersea Town Hall (1892), reliefs for the Charles Street bridge, Westminster, and for the Cardiff City Hall and Law Courts, bronze groups for Kelvin bridge, Glasgow (1914), and a war memorial at Croydon. Montford taught sculpture at the School of Art, Chelsea, in 1898-1903, and was modelling master at the London Polytechnic for

five years. On 11 September 1912 he married Marian Alice Dibdin, portrait painter.

Commissions became scarce, however, after World War I and at 53 the energetic and enthusiastic Montford came to Australia, motivated by his belief that its light was conducive to great monumental sculpture. But he found little prospect of earning a living as a sculptor. He taught at the Gordon Institute of Technology, Geelong, Victoria, and in July 1924 exhibited at the Geelong Art Gallery. The critic J. S. MacDonald suggested the establishment of a sculpture school at the National Gallery of Victoria under Montford's direction. It failed to eventuate but he became influential through his lectures at the Victorian Artists' Society of which he was president in 1930-31. Montford's avant-garde opinions concerning the social and environmental role of sculpture in the modern city were regularly aired, with his usual zeal. His unconventional, flamboyant and theatrical personality, his sculptural practices, Bohemian life-style and his Toorak studio were continuously featured in the Melbourne press.

In 1927, Montford won the commission for the exterior sculptural groups at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. His work for the project was disparaged

in Stead's Review and Smith's Weekly but he was restricted from the outset by the architectural and thematic requirements. Accusations that he habitually looked to the classical world for inspiration are refuted by his exhaustive efforts to present other Australian subjects with precise contemporary detail and historical authenticity. His seated statue of Adam Lindsay Gordon in Spring Street Gardens, Melbourne, condemned in the Australian press, won the gold medal of the Royal Society of British Sculptors (1934). His nearly seventy Australian works include statues of John Wesley (Wesley Church, Melbourne), George Higinbotham near the Treasury, and the memorials to Carlo Catani (St Kilda), Benjamin Chaffey (Mildura), and Sir Ross Smith (Adelaide).

Montford died on 15 January 1938 of leukaemia, at Richmond. His ashes were scattered in the woods at Leatherhead, Surrey, England. His wife, two daughters and son returned to England and were granted a civil list pension in 1939 for Montford's services to sculpture”. (Source: Zimmer, J., “Montford, Paul Raphael (1868 - 1938)” cited on Australian Dictionary of Biography on-line—www.adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100542b.htm)

UNSHRIVEN

OH ! the sun rose on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
 And the steed stood ready harness'd in the hall.
 And he left his lady's bower, and he sought the eastern tower,
 And he lifted cloak and weapon from the wall.

'We were wed but yester-noon, must we separate so soon,
 Must you travel unassoiled and, aye, unshriven,
 With the blood stain on your hand, and the red streak on your brand,
 And your guilt all unconfess'd and unforgiven ?'

'Tho' it were but yester-even we were wedded, still unshriven,
 Across the moor this morning I must ride ;
 I must gallop fast and straight, for my errand will not wait ;
 Fear naught, I shall return at eventide.'

'If I fear, it is for thee, thy weal is dear to me,
 Yon moor with retribution seemeth rife ;
 As we've sown so must we reap, and I've started in my sleep
 At the voice of the avenger, "Life for life."

'My arm is strong, I ween, and my trusty blade is keen,
 And the courser that I ride is swift and sure,
 And I cannot break my oath, though to leave thee I am loath,
 There is one that I must meet upon the moor.'

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Oh ! the sun shone on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
 Down the avenue and through the iron gate,
 Spurr'd and belted, so he rode, steel to draw and steel to goad,
 And across the moor he gallop'd fast and straight.

[The full version of the poem "Unshriven" by Adam Lindsay Gordon can be viewed in the Members' Area of our website www.adamlindsaygordon.org/works_unshriven.htm]

REALISING A DREAM: UNVEILING OF THE STATUE

Finally, two decades after the Appeal was launched, the Gordon statue was unveiled with much fanfare on 30 October 1932; "Speaking as one who had admired the work of Adam Lindsay Gordon from childhood onward, the Premier (Sir Stanley Argyle) addressed a large assemblage yesterday before unveiling the statue of Gordon by Mr. Paul Montford, which has been placed near Parliament House.

Sir Stanley Argyle, who was accompanied by Lady Argyle, said that the statue had been erected for the same reason as that for which Scotsmen had put up the Melbourne statue to Robert Burns. There was a peculiar note of sadness in Gordon's philosophy, and the Australian bush had a similar note. Ogilvie had called Gordon 'the sweetest, saddest singer of the South'; and Kendall, George Gordon McCrae, and many others had paid tribute to him. Our duty to our fellowman was never more beautifully expressed than in the lines on 'Kindness in another's trouble, courage in your own.'

The President of the Legislative Council (Sir Frank Clarke) accepted on behalf of the State Parliament—and he thought he might say on behalf of the people of Victoria and of Australia—the custody and care of the statue of 'our first national poet'. He remarked that the general standard of our statuary in

Melbourne did leave something to be desired. The Lindsay Gordon statue was one of the most adequate and competent that had been erected in Melbourne.

Mr. C. R. Long, who presided, recounted the history of the movement for a statue, which was begun 23 years ago on the suggestion of Mr. Edmund Duggan. He named Mr. Julius Grant, Mr. P. C. E. Widdop (honorary secretary and treasurer), and many others who had taken a leading part in the movement. The first contributor to the statue fund was the Earl of Dudley when he was Governor-General. The Melbourne City Council gave £250, Mr. F. W. Thring £200, the Victoria Racing Club £100, the Victoria Amateur Turf Club £50, and the Moonee Valley Racing Club £50. The fee of the sculptor was £1,650.

The President of the Senate (Senator Lynch), Mr. Holland, M.L.A., Mr. Julius Grant, Mr. G. Holland (director of the Australian Natives' Association), Mr. Edmund Duggan, and others also spoke. The Brighton Band played, and Mr. G. J. Mackay led the singing of hymns.

The bronze statue shows the poet seated as if he is preparing to write. He is in riding dress, and his saddle is near by. Lines from his own poems and from Kendall are inscribed on the pedestal, as well as 'Adam Lindsay Gordon, 1833-1870'.

(Source: The Argus 31 Oct 1932 p6)

THE ADAM LINDSAY GORDON GRAVE RESTORATION APPEAL

We have now raised just over \$6,200 for the future maintenance of Adam Lindsay Gordon's gravesite.

Thank you to everyone who donated to the Appeal especially the following:

Tim Braydon (\$60), Diana Banks (\$30), Alexander Thomas, Andrew Barfoot (\$25).

